



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

**Wildlife
Services**

FY 2004

WILDLIFE SERVICES—VERMONT

Contact Information:

John McConnell, Vermont and New Hampshire Wildlife Services State Director

59 Chenell Drive, Suite 7

Concord, NH 03301-8548

Phone: (603) 223-6832 FAX: (603) 229-1951

E-mail: John.E.McConnell@aphis.usda.gov

Web Site: www.aphis.usda.gov/ws

USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Vermont

Every day, residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on Vermont Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Vermont's relatively small size and continued population growth lead to frequent contact between people and wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

WS works to protect property and reduce human health and safety risks at airports, public buildings and schools, and on State and private lands. The program also protects people, pets, and livestock from wildlife-borne diseases; guards many natural resources from colonial water bird damage; reduces losses by game animals; and educates the public about wildlife and wildlife damage management. Specific projects conducted by Vermont WS include, protecting threatened Eastern spiny softshell turtles from predation; protecting natural resources from double-crested cormorant damage, oral rabies vaccination bait distribution to prevent the northward expansion of rabies, sampling and monitoring for rabies and chronic wasting disease (CWD); reducing wildlife hazards at State operated airports; and managing damage caused by gulls, pigeons, starlings, and other wildlife.

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

Wildlife Services enables people to resolve wildlife conflicts by providing sound technical advice and the loan of damage management equipment and materials. When more complex conflicts require specialized expertise, WS may refer customers to the appropriate public or private source of assistance or conduct site visits and provide *direct assistance* in order to resolve problems. To support these efforts, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop solutions to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure that WS and others benefit from the latest science and technology.

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Reducing the spread of rabies and human exposure to rabies
- Staffing a seven-day a week Rabies Information and Referral Service (Hotline)
- Protecting natural resources and property from double-crested cormorant damage
- Reducing on and off-site safety hazards and property damage at landfills
- Protecting civil and military aviation from wildlife strikes

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Vermont:

- Managing wildlife transmission of rabies
- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Managing double-crested cormorants to protect natural resources and private property
- Managing threats to human health and safety and property caused by pigeons and starlings
- Defining and reducing agricultural losses to turkey, deer, and bear



Protecting Agriculture—WS assists dairy producers in addressing problems associated with large concentrations of starlings and other birds. Damage occurs as birds consume and contaminate feed, which degrades feed quality and reduces milk production. Starlings and other nuisance birds may also be responsible for the spread of salmonella which can affect livestock health and production. The continued success of starling and nuisance bird control programs will likely lead to an increased demand for assistance to dairy and other livestock producers in Vermont.

Preventing and Controlling the Spread of Rabies—Approximately 395 animals were submitted for rabies testing in Vermont in 2004, resulting in 45 positive cases. Positive cases were confirmed in all 5 of Vermont's rabies vector species in 2004 which include: raccoons, skunks, red fox, woodchucks, and bats. In response to rabies threats and other problem wildlife, WS operated a State-Federally funded toll-free Rabies Information and Referral Service (Hotline) for the 13th consecutive year. The Hotline is staffed seven days a week by WS biologists and provides Vermont citizens and visitors to the state accurate and consistent information and recommendations regarding rabies and other wildlife conflicts. During 2004, over 2000 requests for assistance from the public were addressed on the Hotline.

WS cooperated with the Vermont Department of Health, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Province of Quebec and Cornell University for the 8th consecutive year to distribute approximately 370,000 baits containing oral rabies vaccine (ORV) to attempt to prevent the further northward spread of raccoon rabies. The 25-30 mile wide vaccination zone in Northern Vermont was expanded this year to cover 7,102 km² (2742 mi²) of Vermont. To date, approximately 1,800,000 vaccine-laden baits have been distributed throughout northern Vermont to prevent the spread of rabies. A total of 329 biological samples were collected from raccoons within the ORV zone in 2004 to determine bait uptake, assess program effectiveness, monitor rabies movements and characterize raccoon populations. WS role continues to be coordination of ground activities and field sampling activities for this program.

Protecting Human Health and Safety at Airports—Bird strikes to airplanes cost civil aviation over \$500 million annually in the United States and pose a significant hazard to air passengers. WS is recognized for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry both nationally and in Vermont. The WS research program, the National Wildlife Research Center conducts research to develop methods to reduce hazards to aviation and maintains the National Bird Strike Database used by the FAA and airports to monitor trends and wildlife species of greatest concern to aviation.

WS conducted harassment, control and hazard assessment at one state airport in conjunction with integrated gull harassment activities at a nearby landfill. The landfill and airport, which serve as loafing and feeding areas for gulls, are both expanding, which would result in less than 5,000 feet separation between the two facilities. The WS on and off-site integrated harassment program has reduced gull presence at this airport by over 50 percent since the beginning of an on-site integrated harassment program.

In addition to providing formal hazard reduction recommendations, WS continues to perform wildlife control, habitat modification, and harassment activities at individual airports throughout Vermont. In the past 2 years, WS has also conducted short-term wildlife hazard assessments for the 10 State-managed airports in Vermont. WS provides consultations, direct assistance and training to airport personnel throughout the state and assists airports in acquiring federal and state permits that allow designated airport personnel to immediately address bird and mammal hazards at these facilities.

Chronic wasting disease Monitoring—WS continued to assist the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department with chronic wasting disease (CWD) monitoring and sampling activities in 2004. The presence of CWD in Vermont's wild cervid populations would present significant challenges to wildlife agencies because of the impacts on the population itself, as well as perceptions regarding public health implications. WS assisted in the collection and sampling of 323 deer heads from check stations and meat processors located throughout Vermont. The Vermont CWD monitoring and sampling efforts are components of a nationwide program to detect for the presence of this disease.

Protecting State Managed Islands on Lake Champlain—To reduce cormorant damage to natural resources, restore colonial water bird diversity and promote habitat recovery WS in cooperation with Vermont Fish and Wildlife conducted cormorant control activities on Lake Champlain in 2004. On state owned Young Island Lake Champlain, Vermont 1,458 nests (100 percent) were oiled with a goal of zero reproduction. In addition, 208 adult cormorants were removed from the Vermont portion of Lake Champlain to reduce the amount of cormorant related damage on Vermont lands. Biological samples were obtained from over 70 birds for DNA and wildlife health research projects. WS also conducts regular surveys on Lake Champlain and other inland bodies of water to identify cormorant pioneering and movements in Vermont.

Protecting Threatened or Endangered Species—To enhance recovery of the State threatened Eastern spiny softshell turtle WS conducted predator (raccoon, skunk and fox) trapping activities at three separate recovery sites adjacent to Lake Champlain, Vermont. WS removed a total of 62 known nest predators to protect turtle nests from all three sites in 2004. WS also installed temporary electric fences, trail-timer cameras, and conducted habitat modi-

fication activities to further reduce nest predation and monitor turtle nesting success.

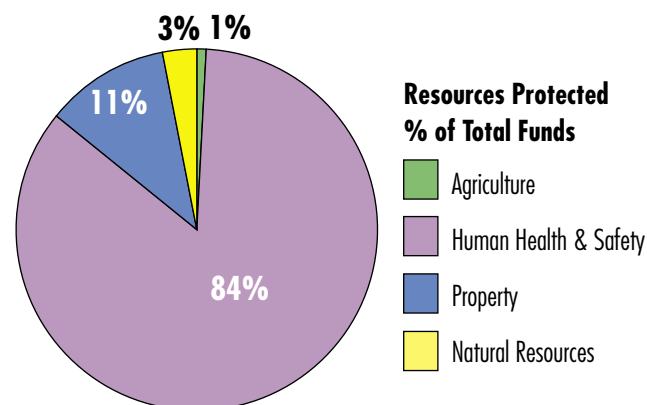
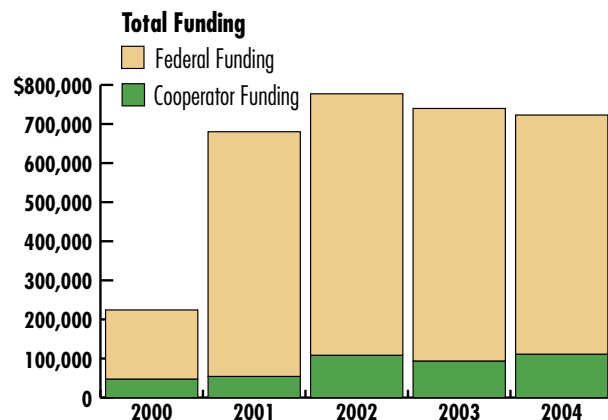
Protecting Multiple Resources from Pigeon Roosting and Loafing Activities—WS assisted the Vermont Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS) by providing technical assistance and direct control assistance to reduce pigeon damage to State managed buildings in Vermont in 2004. Roosting and loafing pigeons are responsible for the accumulation of unacceptable levels of guano, which can damage property and pose a threat to human health and safety when in close proximity to building heating and air conditioning units. WS assisted BGS with nuisance pigeon activities at eight different sites in 2004.

Looking to the Future

WS strives to provide citizens and visitors to Vermont with safe, effective solutions to a diverse range of wildlife conflicts. WS continues to work with dairy farmers on the development and implementation of more effective, integrated management strategies to reduce consumption and contamination of animal feed by birds, as well as other human and animal health issues caused by starlings and other birds at Vermont dairies. Wildlife diseases like lyme disease, salmonella, Newcastle's disease, and chronic wasting disease represent emerging challenges that need to be addressed locally and nationally. In addition, increasing populations of geese, cormorants and gulls pose problems regarding the protection of property and natural resources, and create challenges to ensure human health and safety issues are addressed.

Vermont Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.



Major Cooperators

- Vermont Departments of Fish and Wildlife, Health, Building and General Services
- Vermont Agency of Agriculture
- Vermont Agency of Transportation
- State (UVM) and private universities
- Burlington International Airport; State Airports
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service